

REDEEMER

R E P O R T

SEPTEMBER 2006

AN INVITATION TO BE KNOWN AND CARED FOR

BY SCOTT CROSBY

Redeemer continues to grow as a church with large, quality worship services, a variety of ministry and volunteer opportunities with mid-size groups and a large number of fellowship groups growing as community from week to week. Redeemerites have a sense that they are part of something bigger than themselves at the worship service, that they are valued and seen in mid-size groups and that they are known and cared for in their fellowship groups. The Vision of Redeemer is fresh on everybody's minds and there is an enthusiasm that continues to be contagious. It is an exciting time at our church!

But, we learned by surveying our seven week Vision Groups from last year, that there were plenty of Redeemer members, regular attenders and visitors who joined a Vision Group but had not yet been in a fellowship group—who have not yet sensed that they are known and cared for. Why?

The worship services are more packed than they have ever been—more and more people have a sense that they are a part of something bigger than themselves. Mid-sized events and volunteering opportunities are sought after—more and more people look for ways to connect to the broader church in a way that the large group worship service can not provide.

But what about fellowship groups? What about being known and cared for—the deepest level of belonging and community at Redeemer? If we share vision and beliefs in the worship service and take responsibility for the vision in mid-sized groups, why do we have difficulty accepting accountability to live according to the vision of gospel community together in fellowship groups?

Some common reasons for the difficulty are uncertainties about value, fitting in and relevance. First, it is difficult to know whether investing a

couple of hours with a small group of people each week will be valuable. There is incredible value placed on time in a professional culture.

People wonder whether joining a fellowship group will be worth their time. One way to help Redeemerites experience the value of a fellowship group is to join one of the new series of Beta Groups. Beta Groups are a special type of Fellowship Group that will run for just 7 weeks during the fall—this year from September 24th to November 5th. At the conclusion of the 7 weeks, Beta Group Leaders and members will be invited to make a longer-term commitment to become a “regular Redeemer Fellowship Group,” but there is no obligation to continue. Our experience has taught us that many of the new groups will by then recognize the value of belonging to a group and move beyond the seven weeks. In fact, about 80% of the seven week groups we started last year during the Vision Campaign decided to

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continue on as regular fellowship groups. My own seven week group was included in the number. I can tell you from my group's experience that sharing time together in community has been more than valuable to us!

Second, it is difficult to know whether you will fit in with a group of people who already know each other. There is general uncertainty about fitting in with people who have pre-existing relationships. To reduce this uncertainty about fitting in, our Beta groups will consist of all new members who will study the same curriculum that the rest of the fellowship groups are studying but they will begin on equal footing relationally. There will be an online registration page which will go live on Sunday, August 27th—the same day we will begin on-site registration at

each of our service locations. Beta groups will be a great way to make some new friends and develop community without having to navigate the issue of fitting into established relationships and groups.

Lastly, it can be difficult to see just how the gospel is relevant to the questions asked day to day—particularly the various strong objections presented by friends, family members, neighbors and co-workers. There is a fear that the discussions about the gospel in fellowship groups will lack relevance for answering the tough questions that people ask. Beta Groups will tackle issues of relevance by following along with the biblical text and sermon that we are hearing from the pulpit each week. The new fall sermon series is entitled *My Trouble With Christianity: Why it's so hard to believe it.*

The series will cover difficult topics like:

- *Exclusivity: How can there be just one true religion?*
- *Suffering: If God is good why is there so much evil in the world?*
- *Absolutism: Don't we all have to find truth for ourselves?*
- *Injustice: Hasn't Christianity been an instrument for oppression?*
- *Hell: Isn't the Christian God an angry judge?*
- *Literalism: Isn't the Bible historically unreliable and regressive?*
- *Doubt: What should I do with my doubts?*

Our Beta Groups this fall will be a great time to try out a new group where the invitation to being known and cared for is easier to receive than ever.

HOPE FOR NEW YORK VOLUNTEER FAIR

We will be hosting our semi-annual Volunteer Fair following all Redeemer Services on Sunday, September 24. This event is the perfect opportunity to meet staff and volunteers from our 30+ ministry affiliates serving the poor and marginalized.

There are a wide variety of volunteer opportunities—children and youth projects, meals ministry, outreach to the homeless, women's programs, and more! Come and see how you can use your gifts to serve the city!

For more information, please contact volunteer@hfny.org or (212) 808-4460 x219.

REDEEMER REPORT

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HUNTER COLLEGE AUDITORIUM
East 69TH (Between Park & Lexington)
services at 10:30AM • 5:45PM

ETHICAL CULTURE
West 64TH and CPW
service at 9:15AM

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH
Corner of West 79TH and Broadway
service at 7:00PM

WHAT'S NEW ON THE DIACONATE?

BY JENNY CHANG

Have you ever wondered about the men and women that stand up front answering questions after the service and praying with people? Who are they and what else do they do? They are the deaconesses and deacons of Redeemer and together they are the Redeemer Diaconate.

The Diaconate is a mercy ministry first established by the apostles in Acts 20. Serving on the Diaconate involves primarily client work, which means helping individuals and families from our congregation who are in need of practical assistance to find resources and solutions. Other than client work, our deacs participate in prayers up front, as previously mentioned. Our deacs also take turns manning the Diaconate Helpline, the primary way for the congregation to access Diaconate care. Lastly, they assist the Elders in conducting membership interviews.

This past June, God blessed us with four new deaconesses and two new deacons. This is what they have to say about their experience on the Diaconate so far...

From Suneel Gill:

"My experience on the Diaconate so far has been one in which I have felt a sense of great personal responsibility for my actions, vis-à-vis my client, balanced by the realization that I am simply an instrument that

the Lord uses for his purposes. It has been humbling to serve God's people, whether this has meant praying up front with a person on Sundays, manning the helpline or helping my client get back to work. I am thankful to the Lord for giving me this opportunity to serve him."

From Kay Bhothinard:

"We talk and think much about giving to one another, and rightly so—the Scriptures command it! But what about the receiving? In my first two months on the diaconate, I have been awestruck by the courage, grace and gusto with which our clients ask and receive—be it prayer, a rent check or a word of comfort."

From Jil Guyon:

"I always look forward to serving on 'Prayers up Front' after service on Sunday. Praying with and for those who come forward, and getting to know them on a deeper level than I would otherwise, is not a sacrifice, but rather a pleasure and a joy."

From Lolita Jackson:

"Becoming part of the Diaconate was scary at first. It was humbling to think that I could be a vessel for God's mercy to be extended to someone else. I have found through praying for people up front that, with a humble and servant heart, God will always equip me to help provide comfort and understanding to those who

seek it. I also realize how utterly inadequate I am to do that alone, and it has forced me to always remember that I am NOTHING without him. My total reliance on him in all my other activities has been enhanced due to the Diaconate."

From Tony Vavroch:

"My experience with the Diaconate has challenged me to ponder what I believe as a Christian and who God wants me to be. It's not about being a good person versus a bad person, it's about Jesus, through his mercy, using my heart to glorify him and serve others who are in need of this same mercy."

Lastly, Amy Olson partnered with a young woman in a fragile mental state earlier this summer. She is thrilled to see the client learning to take more ownership of her life issues and has reminded the client to develop a support network that will enable her to see that God loves her and values her.

Everyone on the Diaconate considers it a privilege to serve on a ministry that is an expression of God's love and mercy. We will be accepting nominations for deacon, deaconess and elder in October and November. If you know of a church member who is suited for the office please consider nominating him or her. We need your prayers and support.

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STEWARD LEADERS

BY TIM KELLER

No church can operate without leadership. Redeemer is filled with leaders—from the more visible full-time staff to the officers and to the hundreds of other laypersons who lead ministries through home fellowship groups, Hope for New York, Sunday Services, children and youth, Center for Faith and Work, worship and music, the counseling center, and other areas. How does the Biblical view of leadership differ from other competing views?

A key Biblical theme for understanding Christian leadership is that of stewardship. The steward in ancient times was the household manager of a large estate. He was the “COO” but not the owner. Within this image lies a nuanced understanding of leadership and authority. The paradox of stewardship was that a steward was *both* a ruler

and a servant. He was an authoritative leader (cf. “*put in charge*” Lk 12:44) and yet a servant, because he was managing the household for the lord and owner of the house (Lk 12:45.) This means that there are two opposite sins into which stewards could fall. Either they could fail to remember that they were rulers or fail to remember that they were servants!

Steward-leaders must not be *weak*. They must not be so aware of their servant-status that they fail to assert themselves and take the authority given to them. Jesus speaks directly to this sin in the parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14ff. But on the other hand steward-leaders must also not be *oppressive*. They must not be so forgetful of their servant-status that they become domineering. When this happens both those

beneath them (their fellow-servants) and the master above them are cheated and abused. Jesus also speaks directly of this sin in Luke 12:35ff.

The gospel of free grace means that a Christian believer is *simul justus et peccator*—simultaneously accepted-as-justified and yet still sinful. We have confidence of God’s acclaim and full acceptance now, and yet we still have a sin nature. We want to please the heart, resemble the life, and promote the glory of the one who has saved us. But we will do that imperfectly, at best. Reflecting on this is the ultimate spiritual resource for a leader who must be both a servant and a ruler, both fearless and gentle. It is the kind of leadership we strive to embody at Redeemer, and we hope that you will pray for our leaders that they will increasingly grow into servant-leaders.